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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000888

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: AMBASSADOR AND FM KASIT DISCUSS U.S.
TRIP, BURMA, BOUT, REDSHIRTS, THAKSIN, CAMBODIA, LAO HMONG

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. Ambassador hosted Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya April 6 for a two-hour one-on-one lunch. Ambassador and Kasit discussed Kasit's priorities for his upcoming trip to the U.S. April 19-24 and Kasit's desire to engage the Secretary on strategic issues of interest to both countries; working together on Burma with the shared goal of changing regime behavior, leading to an inclusive dialogue and the release of political prisoners including ASSK; the effort by the judge in the Viktor Bout extradition case to subpoena the MFA; Thai domestic politics, including the upcoming red-shirt march on April 8 and former PM Thaksin's seemingly narrowing options; diplomatic efforts to calm the waters after the most recent round of border skirmishes with Cambodia April 3; and ways of resolving the status of Lao Hmong currently held by Thai authorities. End Summary.

US Trip April 19-24: strategic approach with S

12. (C) Ambassador hosted straight-talking FM Kasit for a two hour lunch at the Residence April 6. Kasit, a former Thai Ambassador to Washington, expressed understanding that Foreign Ministers from Southeast Asia often raise a narrow list of non-strategic bilateral issues in their meetings in Washington, rather than advancing a strategic dialogue. In his planned April 23 meeting with the Secretary, Kasit said he would discuss strategic issues such as Afghanistan-Pakistan and Burma, look to engage in frank dialogue, and not raise a laundry list of "asks" such as GSP.

13. (C) Thailand was supportive of the new U.S. Af-Pak strategy, Kasit stressed, although it could not contribute troops (note: Thailand sent a contingent of Army engineers to work out of Bagram in 2003. End note). Ambassador suggested that the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) successful experience in opium eradication and crop substitution, as well as decades of experience combating heroin trafficking in partnership with DEA, offered the basis for Thai-U.S. cooperation in Afghanistan in this area. Kasit agreed the idea had merit.

14. (C) Note: Addressing the long-standing lack of a Thai Ambassador in Washington, Kasit indicated that he was attempting to get Don Pramadwinai sworn in, perhaps by the Crown Prince rather than King Bhumibol, in time for Don to accompany him on the trip and to be accredited at the next scheduled ceremony in late April. If he could not get Don sworn in prior, he would seek to have Don accompany him as Thai PermRep to the UN.

Bout

15. (C) Ambassador informed Kasit of the latest twist in the extradition proceedings of Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout. Kasit had not heard about the presiding judge's subpoena to the MFA to testify about the potential impact the extradition might have on relations with the U.S. and Russia, but he stated that he did not believe the MFA should testify. Kasit agreed that the court should not use its quest for MFA testimony as a means of delaying the case further, and said he would discuss the matter with MFA PermSec Virasak Futrakul.

Burma

16. (C) Citing the Secretary's introductory call to him prior to her Asia trip, Kasit said he understood that Burma would be high on the Secretary's agenda with him. He looked forward to a good strategic discussion with the Secretary on this topic and openly welcomed the opportunity to work with us on Burma policy. Ambassador raised the challenge of Burma's 2010 elections. If we stake out a position that flawed elections would rule out subsequent cooperation with the Burmese government which emerged, we might be stuck with

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a fait d'accompli. Kasit asserted that the international community should attempt to work with the regime on the election, but with tough criteria:

- push together on the Burmese to release all political prisoners, including ASSK, within a certain period of time (such as the end of 2009);
- demand a clear explanation of the election law; and then
- work for a better law, if necessary, and monitor the process closely.

17. (C) Such an approach would not be perfect, Kasit acknowledged, but the other path--ignoring the elections and not working with the SPDC--would yield even worse results inside Burma, and lock us into a difficult position.

18. (C) Kasit made a pitch for an expansion of assistance to Burma. He said he supported additional U.S. assistance to the border groups operating out of Thailand, but stressed the need to expand assistance on the inside, as well, moving beyond the Irawaddy Delta affected by Cyclone Nargis. Northern Rakhine State should be the next international priority, given the conditions of the Rohingya community. Kasit suggested that his recent visit to Burma gave reason to believe that the SPDC would allow this. Burma now appeared much more comfortable working with ASEAN than it had before, more willing to listen to opinions from other ASEAN members.

19. (C) Kasit expressed understanding for the need for continued sanctions, particularly targeted financial sanctions against the bank accounts and related businesses of regime leaders and key cronies. However, he advocated starting to ease restrictions on certain categories of goods, such as medicines for poultry farms (he said that such antibiotics had to be imported from the U.S. and were not available in Thailand), that support assistance or employment-generating projects going directly to the people.

110. (C) Kasit noted that he would meet with representatives of the Karen National Union (KNU) later April 6 at a private

location in Bangkok, the start of his efforts to facilitate a dialogue between the KNU and the Burmese regime.

Domestic Thai Politics, Thaksin, Crown Prince

¶11. (C) Kasit did not seem worried about the large red-shirt rally planned for April 8, suggesting that the red-shirts had moved too soon to mount their self-proclaimed "D-Day" rally. He did not see a successful way out for the red-shirts, short of violence. Ambassador suggested the government's inability to ensure accountability for previous protest excesses, such as the PAD's seizure of Bangkok airports in late 2008, indicated a breakdown in the judicial process and an inability to assert the rule of law in bounding the limits of protest actions. Kasit agreed on the need to pursue justice for all sides.

¶12. (C) Assessing the current battle of perceptions, Kasit asserted that the RTG needed to do a better job of getting its message out on all the airwaves/media, not just via Abhisit's weekly appearances on government TV. The Democrat Party needed to transition from a party of old-time elites with a sense of entitlement to a progressive party able to explain its programs effectively to the people. In this sense, the recent no-confidence debate called by the opposition served a useful purpose, prodding the RTG to defend itself publicly.

¶13. (S) Ambassador suggested that if Thaksin thought he could wait out the King and cut a deal after the Crown Prince ascended to the throne, Thaksin's current actions, including his open verbal attacks on the Privy Council, would complicate any such rapprochement. Kasit agreed, noting that his recent discussions with the Crown Prince suggested that the Crown Prince is far shrewder than most people believed. The Crown Prince clearly understood the difficulties his personal habits (love of flying and women) presented, and

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that he would need to change prior to assuming the throne. While the Crown Prince had promised several years ago to stop flying, he had not yet done so. Kasit remained confident, however, that the Crown Prince could successfully transition from one role to another, and that he would have no use for Thaksin once he became King.

¶14. (C) Ambassador explained to Kasit that former PM Thaksin may travel to the US, and that since Thaksin had a valid visa, there was nothing we would or could do about it. Kasit understood, noting that Ambassador's clear statements when the issue of Thaksin's visa first arose in the media several months ago had helpfully quelled uncertainty. Thaksin's brief stays in each country he visited effectively ruled out RTG pursuit of an extradition request, which took considerable time to prepare.

Cambodia - calming the waters

¶15. (C) On the matter of the April 3 border skirmishes with Cambodia, Kasit revealed that DPM Suthep had traveled to Cambodia April 5 to meet Hun Sen to clear the air. Kasit offered a balanced assessment of what had happened at the border April 3. Although the landmines which claimed a Thai soldier's leg April 2 appeared to be fresh, Kasit stated that both sides had subsequently overreacted; discussions over the weekend had helped patch things up.

Lao Hmong

¶16. (C) Ambassador raised recent difficulties with the Thai handling of Lao Hmong returned to Laos. Kasit, who visited the Army detention facility in Phetchabun province recently, said that he would check into the allegations that camp

commanders were using arrests on minor infractions to send people back as voluntary returnees. Kasit inquired whether the U.S. was monitoring returnees in Laos. He asked whether the Hmong at Nong Khai who had been screened in with a fear of return could possibly go back to Laos for a very short period, well short of a month, and be processed as political asylum seekers from Laos, as the Lao government was demanding. Ambassador replied that this would not be possible from the U.S. perspective. Kasit stressed that Thailand needed to find some way around the impasse on the Nong Khai Hmong and still maintain its much improved relationship with Laos.

JOHN